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SUBJECT: PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS AFTER EID?

Classifie By: William T. Monroe. Reasons: 1.4 (B)(D)

1.(C) Although the government has still not formally announced a date for parliamentary elections, indications are that they will be held in late October or early November, just after the post-Ramadan Eid al-Fitr holiday. Minister of Industry and Commerce Hassan Fakhro told the Ambassador June 3 that he expects the elections to be held in early November, with the new parliament convening in early December. On June 4, the local press reported parliamentary sources as indicating that the new Parliament would convene on December 2, following elections that would be held after the Eid al-Fitr holiday (projected for October 23-25).

12. (C) Fakhro stated that parliamentary and municipal elections would be held at the same time this cycle (in 2002, municipal elections were held in the spring, parliamentary elections in the fall). He said this was being done solely for practical administrative and cost-savings purposes. He thought that holding the elections together might increase overall turnout.

13. (C) Separately, Advisor to the Prime Minister for Legal Affairs (and former Minister of Justice) Jawad Al-Arrayed stated to the Ambassador that the King has told the Prime Minister to get ready for a new parliament headed Al-Wifaq Chairman Shaikh Ali Salman. Al-Arrayad said that the King is fully prepared for a strong performance in the election by Al-Wifaq, which boycotted the last election. He stated that the last four years had been useful for giving Ministers a taste of what it is like to be grilled by parliamentarians about issues under their purview. The next four years, he stated, will be much tougher for the Ministers and the government.

14. (C) Comment: Given the timing of the summer holidays and Ramadan, a post-Eid elections timeframe makes sense. Holding elections in early September just before Ramadan would have made campaigning more difficult, as many people are away on vacation in August. Having the elections just after Ramadan will give candidates a good opportunity to take advantage of the Ramadan majlis tradition to help get their message out.

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